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ABSTRACT

A research project studied Canadian organizations that are using informal organizational learning approaches to embed ongoing learning within the actual work processes. Five organizations that self-identified as learning organizations at mature stages of development were studied in depth. No organization was a paragon of organizational learning. This phenomenon was much less an outcome than an ongoing process of managing paradoxes. Each research site provided both examples of the dilemmas that challenged them continuously and examples of creative responses to these dilemmas with which they were experimenting with varying degrees of success. These paradoxes included the tensions inherent in action versus reflection and the need to achieve the task by attending to the process; the need for structured leadership as well as freedom and autonomy; the challenge of translating values into action; the use of conflict and confrontation to enable collaboration; and the balancing of individual and organizational learning needs. Responses to these dilemmas are, respectively, mentoring relationships, communities of practice, skill development, shared set of values; shared leadership, participative decision making; values clarification, gap examination, behavior modeling; interpersonal skill training, time for reflection, multi-user feedback; and maintaining the balance. (Contains 36 references.) (YLB)

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MODELS OF ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING: PARADOXES AND BEST PRACTICES IN THE POST INDUSTRIAL WORKPLACE

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Introduction

In the light of current examples of reengineering, restructuring, mergers and acquisitions, some organizations across sectors provide a context for individuals and teams to negotiate effectively the kind change which has become endemic in today's workplace. A focus on informal organizational learning contributes to employees' collective ability to move beyond simply coping with stress to engaging in creative action, for the benefit of both the individual members and the organization as a whole.

A three-year research project was conducted between 1998-2001, to locate and study Canadian organizations which are using such organizational learning approaches to embed on-going learning within the actual work processes - whether at an individual, team or strategic level. One of the challenges which organizations face in proceeding with such transformative experiments is their lack of knowledge about current examples of successful projects. This research intended to be a voice for Canadian models of organizational learning which have benefited the organization and its clients or customers, as well as its employees or volunteers, whose lives are dramatically affected by these new organizational forms. Our hope was that, by providing visibility to such "models" of organizational learning, the research would not only reinforce best practices already in existence, but also demonstrate the potential of such practices across work sectors, organizational size, and widely diverse employee populations.

The study initially identified forty-two organizations, which either self-reported or appeared in the literature as examples of those attempting to become, or demonstrating features of, a learning organization. Of these, each of the ten organizations which agreed to participate in the research had administered, to a cross-section of 10 randomly selected employees, The Learning Organization 5 Stage Diagnostic Survey (Woolner et al., 1995).

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The results of this survey provided researchers with five organizations which self-identified at mature stages of development as a learning organization in the areas of individual, team and strategic learning.[2] Of the five, four of these organizations – a medium-sized hospital, a large retail chain, a small not-for-profit government funded organization, and a large electronics manufacturer volunteered for more in-depth study through individual interviews, focus groups and on-site observation.

Organizational Learning in its Historical Context

Since the industrial revolution in the nineteenth century, formal organizations have been the primary site of work and workplace learning for most of the industrialized world. This sounds like a neutral statement of fact until one considers the implications. Consistent misinterpretations and misuses of the concepts of Scientific Management (Taylor, 1947; Gantt, 1960), Bureaucracy (Weber, 1947) and Administrative Theory (Fayol, 1949) have left a legacy of organizational forms which are tenaciously hierarchical and inflexible, unresponsive to turbulent environments and notoriously inhospitable to human creativity and learning. Gareth Morgan, in his 1986 treatise, *Images of Organization*, refers to organizations as "psychic prisons" and "instruments of domination" - and indeed, that names the lived experience of a majority of workers in twenty-first century workplaces across sectors and throughout the world.

Unionization has attempted, with some success, to respond the plight of the workforce, however the essential structure and impact of hierarchical organizational design has remained largely untouched. Alternatives in the form of co-operatives and collectives have provided more equitable models, but despite their efficacy in many cases, they have not, nor are they likely to, become the norm for organizational design. One possible response is to desert formal organizations for virtual workplaces and entrepreneurial ventures. Although that seems to be working for increasing numbers of people, the on-going need for collective coordinated effort and resource allocation, the lack of security, the imperative of unaccustomed self-direction, and financial constraints make this an unrealistic option for most. What, then, is the answer for the millions of workers who continue to live out their lives in "quiet desperation", in organizations which essentially have continued to be physically, psychologically and emotionally inhumane?

Since the advent of the Behavioural School of management thought in the 1930s - 60s, through the growth of the field of Organizational Development through the 1970s - 80s, to the current exploration of organizational learning, attempts have been made to address this issue. As a result, many organizations have begun to respond more consciously and conscientiously to the "human side of enterprise" (McGregor, 1960). In the last two decades, Socio-technical Systems Design, Quality of Work Life and Business Process Reengineering approaches all represent attempts to address the systemic/structural concerns outlined here (Boyette and Conn, 1992; Hodgetts, Luthans & Lee, 1994;

[2] Woolner et al (1995) define a "stage 5" organization as one in which business strategies are based on a shared collective vision; structures and functions are flexible and responsive to organizational needs; there is direct information sharing and a constant questioning of assumptions and testing of reality; and work and learning are fully integrated.

Offerman and Gowing, 1993). However, it is most recently, largely in response to the ideas of Peter Senge and his colleagues at MIT (1990, 1999), that organizations are beginning to show some promise of systematically incorporating a *learning agenda* into their change processes.

The notion of learning within organizational settings is not new. Since the Industrial Revolution, training of employees in the technical skills needed for their job has been a key component of organizational functioning. Individual learning and skill enhancement continues today, both to meet job requirements as well as to help employees develop their career potential. These learning opportunities appear in a variety of forms, including designed classroom training sessions, computer-mediated distance learning or audio teleconferencing; and the individualized use of interactive multi-media.

Additionally, team learning opportunities provide the members of a work team with skills which are specifically relevant to their needs, while organizational learning focuses on the strategic, systemic issues which underlie an organization's ability to transform itself in the face of a turbulent, constantly changing and globally competitive environment.

Margaret Wheatley (1992) says: "I believe that we have only just begun the process of discovering and inventing the new organizational forms that will inhabit the twenty-first century" (p. 5). Clearly, learning is considered by many to be the common element in ensuring the successful functioning of such organizational forms.

Learning in the past has mainly been associated with teaching in its various iterations. This usually implies a subject-matter expert who designs a training session, creates a computer program, or writes a technical manual. Learning is removed from the immediate work environment on which it is expected to have an impact, while the facilitators of such learning experiences concern themselves with how to ensure effective "transfer" of skills and understanding back to the work milieu. The results of such efforts have been disappointing. Despite highly successful experiences within a classroom setting, specific outcomes have been difficult to assess, and links between such non-formal learning opportunities and their actual impact on the job almost impossible to ascertain with any confidence (Laiken, 1992). Additionally, the cost has been prohibitive, and the measurable outcome almost negligible.

In response, a cadre of academics and practitioners have begun to explore the impact of embedding learning within the actual work processes - whether they be at an individual, team or organizational level. The ultimate goal of these efforts is organizational transformation, the prerequisite of which is on-going individual and team learning (Richter & McKenna, 1995; Alleyne and Hoffman, 1992; Pedlar, Burgoyne & Boydell, 1991). John Seely Brown says:

> Maybe our problems are that our theories of learning and epistemological distinctions are broken and that we keep learning from happening. We tend to confuse learning with education and training, and we fail to leverage the inherent learning in action and in conversation. Correctly designed, the workplace will

> become a seat of both individual and organizational learning, mediated by communities of practice. (1992, p.99)

The intention of our research was to examine organizations that have been successful, to some extent, in enacting John Seely Brown's vision of workplaces as "communities of practice", in which learning at all levels plays a major role.

The Paradoxes of Organizational Learning: Lessons from the "Models"

Predictably, our study found that no organization is a paragon of organizational learning. In fact, what became abundantly clear was that this phenomenon is much less an *outcome* than an on-going *process* of managing paradoxes. Each of the research sites provided both examples of dilemmas that challenged them continuously, and examples of creative responses to these challenges with which they were experimenting, with varying degrees of success.

These paradoxes include the tensions inherent in: action versus reflection, and the need to achieve the task by attending to the process; the need for structured leadership as well as freedom and autonomy; the challenge of translating values into action; the use of conflict and confrontation to enable collaboration; and the balancing of individual and organizational learning needs. Each of the research sites presented a unique context in which to examine these issues, while at the same time providing common, thematic approaches to creating working environments which contribute both to individual health and organizational sustainability. Following are several of the key dilemmas uncovered by our research and a description of how these were responded to within our "model" learning organizations.

Action Versus Reflection: The Value of the Journey in an Outcome-oriented World

The Dilemmas

As global competition increases in intensity, the pressure to produce is also intensified. Whether the product is defined as services or goods, the general tendency in the workplace is to view time spent on specific task completion as the only legitimate form of work. Meetings are often experienced as time "away from the real work", and therefore as time wasted. Social interactions, whether they are informal hallway conversations, or more formal meetings specifically designed for the purpose of reflective thinking, amplify this concern. Statements such as the following were typical of our research sites:

Oh, they look bored at the meeting, and they don't make notes, and they think, "well didn't we already discuss this"? So people try to speed up the tempo, you know at the meetings, and it's a good thing, because there's work to do. But on the other hand, it's also a forum where you can think – we need to meet, because there will be issues – you know there are – that we should get a little deeper into..

As indicated by the ambivalence in this statement, workers realize that such reflective time is an absolutely essential component of learning from their experience (Lewin, 1951; Kolb, 1984), and thus increasing their productive capacity and well as their individual knowledge and skill. Research on reflective practice (Argyris & Schon, 1978; Argyris, 1990) has indicated that unexamined experience simply repeats itself; while a conscious examination of the learning to be derived from direct experience results in new approaches that often avoid the mistakes of the past. The paradoxical outcome is, in fact, a case of slowing down in order to speed up. Our own research indicates that decision-making is improved, work efficiency increased, and overall productivity enhanced, if workers are encouraged to collaboratively or individually intersperse periods of reflection with direct action in their working lives.

However, apart from the lack of value attributed to reflective activities, there are several other deterrents to incorporating reflective practice organizationally. When personality and work-style differences (Myers, 1980; Kolb, 1984) surface in a meeting, the pressure to move to action tends to reinforce a more convergent, closure oriented style, as opposed to one which continues to expand on possibilities. Although this is useful when a decision finally needs to be made, it is less helpful when the intention is to reflect on practice for the purpose of learning. Additionally, when one considers the fact that the skills involved in reflection are not as highly valued, and therefore not taught or practiced as much in the action-oriented workplace, it is not surprising that these skills are generally under-developed among organizational members, regardless of personal style differences.
In a work team, reflective practice ideally would balance a task or content orientation with periods of reflection on the team's process, or discussion about *how* the team is accomplishing the task. Although the need for this balance is sometimes, though rarely, recognized, the implementation is fraught with difficulties:

But it does take work, though. I mean, you think about a team – it doesn't just happen on its own. It takes its course – and the problem is, people get so caught up with doing the other work that they have to do that they don't take the time to build their team, and so the teamwork doesn't get improved.

In the Learning Organization...

In the learning organization, the central context for knowledge enhancement and skill development is shifting from the non-formal environment of classroom training, to the more informal learning environment of the workplace itself. Here, the teachers are colleagues and managers who are engaged with each other in "action learning" (Revans,1982), or extracting the learning from the immediate work challenges. Although some tasks clearly require training prior to engagement, much of the on-going learning occurs in the moment, as workers proceed through an individual cycle of action-reflection-action. This may take place in individual interactions on the job or during breaks, or it might be incorporated into meetings specifically designed for this purpose. As a recent article on "Trends in Workplace learning" notes:

... most of what people know is learned on the job just by talking to other people, milling around the coffee pot, trying out new things, and doing their work. Formal training, though essential, cannot serve as a substitute for these powerful, informal means of learning. (Bassi, Cheney & Lewis, 1999, p.7)

What makes the learning organization unique is its conscious intention to legitimize and create space for such informal learning. This is accomplished through a variety of approaches:

a. by helping to establish supportive, mentoring relationships in which the mentor acts as a coach, or peer partners act as coaches for one another. The activities may involve job shadowing, help in reflecting on problems or mistakes to extract learning, and the provision of resources or guidance;

b. by encouraging "communities of practice" (Wenger, 1996, 1999) which enable informal dialogue on work-related issues of concern. The expected outcome of these groups is not a decision toward action, although that might be a by-product of the discussions. Rather, it is an on-going or time-limited opportunity to learn together through open interaction. The members learn the dialogic skills of "advocacy" and "inquiry" (Elinor and Gerard, 1998; Isaacs, 1993; Brenegan, 2000) within a forum which, although situated in the workplace, is removed temporarily from the necessity for task completion.

An example is provided by one of our research participants who explains:

...nd in our template of what we look at in a grant evaluation, one of the questions will be, what has Wealthshare learned? That's one of the questions we ask – and everybody reflects on that. It can be "what have I learned as a program manager working with this project?" or "what has Wealthshare learned?" And Wealthshare may have learned never to fund this kind of project again, or only to look at it a certain way..

c. by providing skill development, either through action learning or classroom training, in the process-oriented and facilitative skills necessary to support reflective practice. These include the ability to help a team debrief its work and extract learning related to its functioning; the ability to use dialogic approaches in informal group explorations, as previously described; the ability to individually reflect on one's experience in order to reach conclusions which can then be tested in action; and the interpersonal skills required to check assumptions, explore differing world views and learn from others through genuine, open interaction (Argyris, 1990; Senge, 1990).

d. by developing a shared set of values which reinforce and make public the organization's commitment to creating an environment for learning, as outlined in the three preceding points.

Structured Leadership Versus Freedom And Autonomy: "Waiting for Godot"

The Dilemmas

Across our research sites we found among our interviewees a shared desire for freedom and autonomy. Workers are clear that the more room they feel to give rein to their individual creativity, the more likely they are to be satisfied and productive in their jobs. However, at the same time as they desire freedom, they expect leadership. They search for the boundaries of organizational expectations within which to exercise their creative potential, and feel lost and chaotic when such structure is not in place, as illustrated in the following quotation:

And you've hired people here that are very independent thinkers, and it wouldn't hurt to put some structure in place that labeled out where free thinking is a "go", and where expectations are, so that you have an idea of what is expected of you, versus where you have leeway...

Similarly, work teams often require directive leadership initially, in order to become self-directed eventually. Effective work groups do not suddenly appear, fully developed and highly motivated. They need careful nurturing by a team leader who is enabling rather than controlling, empowering rather than overpowering, and facilitative rather than coercive. The dilemma for would-be team leaders, then, is to provide very strong leadership towards eventual team self-management.

In the context of the organization as a whole, the dilemma of responsibility versus authority is an issue for both individuals and teams. As teams become increasingly self managing, and able to assume responsibility, they also require the authority to make implementation decisions. However, in many organizations, employees are expected to take responsibility for decisions, but are not granted accountability for the outcomes. When the outcome of and accountability for decisions made by a team fall on the shoulders of a manager, there is little learning that results for either.

Finally, the myth of the "hero leader" (Senge et al, 1999) or, as it is named here, "waiting for Godot", plays a large part in disempowering all organizational members. The dilemma lies in the fact that visionary leadership is essential, if an organization is to remain aligned and focused in its efforts. However, the tendency for workers to look to the leader(s) for all solutions to the organization's problems exerts unrealistic pressure on those in a leadership role. If, as was the case in one of our research sites, there is no leader in place temporarily, the temptation is strong to expect no forward movement until "Godot" appears:

Well, you know, we're without leadership at the moment. I'm optimistic that you get somebody new and energetic and eager to mend some of these things, and it can be resolved.

In the Learning Organization...

The learning organizations that we examined have very strong *leadership*, as opposed to *management*. At the top of the organization, this translates into a strategic, visionary focus on the part of leaders who are cognizant of trends in their industry, the needs of their customer or client populations, and the context in which their organization is functioning. Through carefully structured processes, individuals and teams are enrolled in the organizational vision, and are asked to interpret it locally at the team, department or division levels. This shared interpretation then provides the context within which autonomous decisions are made and personal creativity flourishes:

I think it worked well because there was a clear focus and a clear objective to achieve, and also a really small group – just four of us, and yeah, we had some authority to make recommendations, and design the whole thing.

In this setting, the key challenge for the manager is to share the leadership role with all employees. Shared leadership skills, which involve every member in playing leadership roles, are consciously nurtured - on the job, during team meetings, in coaching sessions with a supervisor or peer, and as a result of reflecting on experience. The leader/manager is active in modeling leadership behaviours, and then helping employees to learn these through calculated risks and careful experimentation. A climate of continuous learning and "no blame" allows workers to make provisional attempts, receive feedback from supervisors and colleagues, make changes, and try again. Teams which are not only responsible, but also accountable for their decisions, engage as well in this experiential learning cycle of action – reflection – learning/change – new action.

In the learning organization, "hero leaders" are not rewarded. Rather than being encouraged as experts who make unilateral decisions, leaders are encouraged to enlist widespread involvement, ensuring that individuals and teams affected by decisions play a key role in helping to make them. Thus, participation in decision-making at all levels is built into the fabric of the organization, providing room for individual voice within the parameters provided by visionary leadership:

Work groups were staff-driven, grass roots – meaning it was complete participation. People could just sign up and say "yeah – I'm so concerned about decision-making processes here, I want to be on that work-group. And so we figured out some parameters, and enabled staff to find their voice through these work groups.

Espoused Theory Versus Theory in Use: Values into Action

The Dilemmas

Organizational leaders and members may well value learning for its own sake, and may even believe that a learning climate, with room for reflective practice, will contribute to

improved productivity. Additionally, they may recognize the importance of visionary leadership, and have gone as far as creating a shared vision among all employees.

However, there is often a gap between what is genuinely valued and what actually occurs in practice. This is to be expected, as a "vision" is just that – it is not the reality, but the goal to which energies are being directed. However, the dilemma often faced by organizational members is that the outcome orientation discussed earlier precludes a careful examination of the gaps between values and action. Also, our typically conflict adverse organizational cultures (Laiken, 1994, 1997) mitigate against open confrontation when the gaps become obvious. The result is cynicism among workers, expressed in hallway complaints about leaders and others "not walking the talk":

I think we have a shared agreement, in terms of the idea that, well, our vision is what it's always been – so that, that's in the program guidelines, it's our vision and mission. But in terms of how that's actually carried out, it's different....

We say were family-friendly – but we're doing this off-site training where there's evening meetings – how are we going to incorporate that?

In the Learning Organization...

In the learning organization, work-related beliefs and values are clearly articulated as outcomes of the visioning process. Although not everyone will agree, and one of the beliefs may reflect a valuing of difference, there will be some common values to which everyone attempts to adhere. For instance, in one of our research sites, there was an effort to reach agreement on supervisory approaches in relation to supporting staff autonomy. An interviewee said:

We're going to have a supervisory training workshop next week, with all of our people in staff positions. We're starting to lay the groundwork for what we see as important, and then developing a collective vision about how we supervise staff, how we support staff's autonomy. Then we'll develop some standards coming out of that, and those become performance issues.

Once the values are clear, the learning organization allocates time to examining the gaps between the vision and the reality, and these are made discussible. This may occur during staff or team meetings, in a retreat setting, or daily, as people engage in their work.

Whatever the context, the culture of the organization enables and even rewards staff at any level who have the courage to confront gaps which they are experiencing, with a constructive problem-solving orientation.

Those in a leadership role, in particular, are expected to model this behaviour, and to invite feedback on and take ownership for their own lapses and successes as they strive to put theory into practice. Although there are commonly acknowledged difficulties in confronting one's manager for not "walking the talk", these are offset if the

organizational culture legitimizes and even rewards both the confronter for their courage, and the confrontee for their openness and willingness to make their behaviour an opportunity for learning. This is well demonstrated by an anecdote from one of our research sites:

There were a number of times when people made a courageous step towards calling our CEO on some stuff. That was really helpful for the whole rest of the staff, when they took that step – you know, basically a "time out" – like, "I don't think you're respecting my opportunity to speak in this arena". People, including the CEO, acknowledged the courageousness of that step.

Conflict/Confrontation to Enable Collaboration

The Dilemmas

One of the concerns repeatedly expressed by our research participants, in their attempts to close the gap between theory and practice, is the potential for conflict in this endeavor. Previous research on conflict in the workplace (Laiken, 1994) has indicated that organizations tend to be conflict-adverse. Employees fear raising issues, particularly with managers, because of possible repercussions - ranging in their imagination from subtle retaliation to losing one's job. Additionally, lack of skill across the organization in constructive confrontation leads employees to believe that problems, even if surfaced, are unlikely to be satisfactorily resolved. This is exacerbated by the fact that organizations have traditionally developed a culture of blame versus problem solving, thus providing few examples of successful conflict management. As one interviewee noted:

There's that level of frustration with differences – either with their fellow coordinators in their area, or with their Program Managers, you know, that they feel they can't address it in that way and be open with each other. I mean, I don't think they're afraid of saying it – but I think they feel that it's not going to get resolved, anyway.

In the Learning Organization...

Organizations that are intent on learning from experience prohibit, both culturally and procedurally, the use of threat, punishment or blame. Instead, mistakes or problems are viewed as opportunities for learning, and issues of concern are routinely surfaced, with a view to improving future performance in this area:

We're laid back when it comes to mistakes that happen – we recognize it for what it is, it's a small thing, no problem, no blame. We recognize it for what it is and we always say, this is the phrase that always comes back – "next time we'll do it better".

These organizations recognize the fact that, despite their positive intentions, skills in confronting conflict directly are not commonplace among employees. They therefore provide specific training in the interpersonal skills of: active listening; giving and

receiving feedback; engaging in dialogue versus debate, which involves both advocacy and inquiry; problem-solving issues which are resolvable; and holding differences when the problem represents a polarity to manage (Johnson, 1992).

On the job, opportunities to reflect and address issues directly are designed into the work systems and processes. For instance, team meetings include a period of reflection on how the team has operated, in order to surface members' suggestions for improving its functioning. Day-to-day coaching by managers and peers provides opportunities for workers to reflect on their task outcomes and learn from experience, and feedback is encouraged as part of this process:

I would speak to the person who wrote it, like in a situation, there was a memo going out to the Board, and the person who had written it, she had made a typo which changed the meaning completely. So I just called her, I said, "You know I just read this, I think this is what it should read .." , and she said, "Thank-you ever so much – good thing you found it". So, I mean, people are not embarrassed by making mistakes ... it happens to everybody.

Finally, the use of multi-rater feedback is commonplace as a source of information for developmental purposes, and this is built into the performance management systems.

In the learning organizations we researched, the entire community supports, through ad hoc meetings as well as structured opportunities, the direct and honest confrontation of problems which may be inhibiting individual, team or organizational effectiveness, and decisions are constantly informed by the discussions which ensue from these meetings:

Yeah – the whole issue of the central team meeting we discussed among ourselves and the Program Manager, that we needed to confront the issue. So we organized a meeting with the Vice-President, and the Area Manager present, to confront the issue. Yeah, and it made it happen – it's after that point that we dissolved the Central Team meeting.

Individual Versus Group Learning Needs

The Dilemmas

All of the organizations in our study supported individual learning in a variety of ways. These ranged from in-house classroom training to computer-mediated individual learning, and included support for attendance at courses, conferences and classes in university programs. In unionized contexts, this support was usually provided in collaboration with the labour organization, with many learning opportunities provided by the union itself. Individual learning also occurred on the job through one-on-one coaching and mentoring, or in groups, as peers worked with each other to provide technical and interpersonal skills training, as illustrated in the following example:

We did a collective analysis of the applications – I think to provide different views, different ways of looking at an application. It just came out of the group. I think it was

mentioned that they wanted to develop a systematic way of doing this, but I think it has not really been looked at yet.

However, imbedded in the foregoing quote is also a dilemma for these organizations, in that most of them struggled with a way to integrate the individual learning systemically. Unless this occurs, individuals who leave the organization take their knowledge with them, and even those who remain are not encouraged to share their learning with others in systematic ways. This results in having to "reinvent the wheel" each time a problem arises anew, with limited capacity to build on previous attempts to address the issue.

An additional contributor to this problem is resistance to having learning formalized, or as expressed by one of our interviewees – "written in stone" – which is seen as a potential inhibitor of creativity and flexibility. Thus, although learning spontaneously in the moment is valued, the challenge for the learning organization is to find some way to capture this learning for future reference.

In the Learning Organization...

The organizations we researched were beginning to come to grips with this dilemma- often as a result of frustration caused by lack of information or historical context for decisions, in workplaces where personnel are constantly changing:

We have really had to root and dig just for the methodology on how certain things were done. So what we're doing in response to that is creating an orientation manual, so that would not be so difficult to find in subsequent years, but more importantly so that information is there to learn from as we go through the evaluation this year, to see where this program is indeed going.

In addition, inter-organizational learning is valued as an opportunity to study "best practices", share problems and solutions, and generally support individual and organizational development. One organization we researched actually defined one of its roles as that of "knowledge broker" – helping to bridge the learning from one organization to another within the context of community development:

... we have thought through how to gather thematic information about communities -. about how people are struggling with important issues in their communities. What is transferable "best practice" from one place to another. And that's the knowledge creation, in a way, and it's at a macro level. And also, the sharing can be micro - being a "knowledge broker" in that sense, using our resources to create the kind of documents that could really help – little "how-to's", for example.

In each of these cases, past experience is exploited for its learning potential, with caution about using it as a barrier to innovation (as in: "we've always done it this way in the past, therefore, why change it?").

This dilemma surfaces the on-going debate among adult educators about informal learning in the workplace (Livingstone, 1999), raising the concern that "systematizing" such learning disempowers the individual learner in the interests of achieving a corporate agenda (Church, 2000). In our research sites, the effort was continuously focused on maintaining a balance between the two. Individual and organizational learning were not viewed as mutually exclusive, but rather as additive in their power to enhance both the experience of the worker, as well as the effectiveness of the organization. Maintaining this balance is proving to be one of the most demanding, but also one of the most rewarding of the various challenges encountered by the organizations in our study.

Summary

Indeed, managing all of the paradoxes identified here seems to be the key learning project of the twenty-first century learning organization. Transformative learning – that which truly changes the way in which a person views the world (Cranton, 1994), appears to be more about the journey than the outcome. "Being there" is not the point - as human organizations, like other growing organisms, are constantly in a state of flux. It is managing that state, in a way that enhances the worker's individual experience and consequently, the organization's viability, that differentiates our "model" organizations from others. In this respect, the four organizations examined in our research have a great deal to contribute to the world of workplace learning and change, as they courageously struggle with the dilemmas outlined in this paper.

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